

W O R D S & V i z i o n

UCFV Faculty & Staff Association Newsletter

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In this issue

FROM THE EDITOR 1

REPORTS

- President 3
- Faculty Grievance 5
- Staff Grievance 5
- Women & Human Rights 6

ARTICLES

- Grading: Pandora's Box .. 6
- Emperor has no Clothes . 8
- On Whatever 11
- To Bard or Not 11
- Acroquiz 12

NOTES & NOTICES 13

From the Editor

The Cafatrocity Files

Thanks for your responses to the call for messages re culinary crimes perpetrated by food services hereabouts. A significant batch of feedback came in, and I'll write up your concerns/comments in a report to Management. Here are a few highlights:

First off, the passion this topic has aroused came as a surprise. There's a real sense of outrage in the Cafatrocity mailbox, all arising, it seems, from a single basic principle: people aren't asking for gourmet fare, but feel they have a right to expect

decent quality and value for money. I mean, it's a given — and a bonding mechanism — that the incarcerated whine and complain about institutional food; but consensus here is strong that our situation is quite different, that the caf is really pushing the old enchilada. For instance, according to one serious-minded and well-informed correspondent, there is an agenda to *further* decrease the quality of food. Apparently we will notice a minor improvement over the short term as Chartwells jockeys to renew its mandate (up in July) by lulling us into a false sense of nutrition. After that, though, it's going to be industrial-strength sludge all the way. *Diabolical*.

Second, I hadn't realized that for Staff the Cafatrocity can be even more problematic than it is for Faculty. Staff schedules are mostly very regular, throughout the week, and hence Staff members may be more dependent on food services. Or is it that Faculty tend to be post-modernly hopeless in outlook, and therefore more fatalistic? Some claim, to my astonishment, that they just don't care anymore — while exhuming with trembling fingers a stale sandwich on cardboard bread from its plasti-pack coffin, and gnawing like animals at their desks/troughs. Meanwhile, pockets of rebels are pro-actively searching out alternatives, doing the required research and ordering/picking up foodstuffs from elsewhere for themselves and their various tribal groupings.

Third, another valid complaint I got is that food services ignores people with special dietary needs, not providing alternatives, etc. As pointed out by several of my own students in informal surveys, the Cafatrocity is also culturally insensitive. Although about 20% of our student population is of Indo-Canadian background, just for example, you certainly never get a whiff of Roghan Josh, Chicken Vindaloo, or any other sultry curry, down there.

I'll keep you posted.

Who is in Charge of Moral Authority, Anyway? — Part 2

Recently, several FSA members came to me expressing concerns about a censorship issue that has emerged at the ABBY bookstore. Seems the cover of an art textbook was upsetting to several people employed in the store; in response to their discomfort, the covers were removed and cached in the back room. These are the facts, as far as I understand them third-hand.

Words & Vision: newsletter of the University College of the Fraser Valley Faculty and Staff Association.

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Contributions and ideas are welcome from all members.

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Apparently the cover image suggested kiddie porn to the offended viewers, and, having seen it, I can certainly understand people being upset; it's a disturbing image, depicting nude (except for running shoes) mannequin-like children engaged in sex acts in an Edenic, leafy setting. The provoking painting, by Jake and Dinos Chapman, reproduced on the cover is titled "Tragic Anatomies." Superimposed dead centre on the image, is the book's title, *High Art Lite*, presented in a white circle. As that title suggests, this book, by art and culture critic, Julian Stallabrass, offers an analysis/deconstruction of the 'shocking' contemporary art that is often in the news these days: i.e., works with pornographic and violent imagery, blasphemous subject matter, 'shit' paintings, *et alia*. The author queries, in a thoughtful and lively way, the value of art in mass culture, its assumptions (post-post-modern and otherwise), and the hype behind many such artworks — the kind of questions one would expect Fine Art students in a post-secondary program to be rightly pondering.

Of course, the arbitrary removal of these — or indeed any — textbook covers raises all sorts of questions. First of all, there are so many images that could offend, and so many ways to offend, depending on the sensibilities and perspectives of the specific viewer(s). Besides, why stop at the cover? I'm sure some pages inside books sold in the bookstore would also perturb sundry individuals. From there, where will the censorship proceed?

Perhaps, to begin with, a basic question needs to be addressed: to what extent, if any, should persons outside a particular department be involved in its curriculum? Who knows: maybe some day one of our cherished UCFV Librarians, pushed beyond endurance, will take exacto knife and glue stick in hand and, *à la* Joe Orton, start excising what she/he might deem inopportune content from selected tomes. What then?

My own personal bugaboo, as you may know, is lewd and lascivious landscaping. Lurking out on the pond

side of D Bldg, for instance, where it's buzzing with bugs right now, there's a particularly nasty bit of shrubbery that flaunts its privets shamelessly, grossly violating my individual rights every single day. Think I'll bring in my little hatchet next week and —

Where I'm going with this, gentle colleague, is pretty shameless, too. You can bet your bippy, or whatever, that shocking book covers are being designed even as I write; so an incident like this cannot be dismissed as a 'one-time deal'. More to the point, perhaps, is the history of such apparent 'offences' at UCFV, i.e., student art works set out in the ABBY halls distressing folks on their way to and from the office. Maybe it's time to develop some policy on this matter, to avoid further potential conflicts?



I Am a Deviant

There it is, out in the open at last, and I feel much better for having the truth naked, so to speak. It's been an epiphany of sorts, as I 'fess up here in light of the engrossing paragraphs below, from several fearless contributors, on academic freedom and grading.

Our Pres's report includes cogent thoughts on a particularly complex and long-running grievance involving student objections vis 'Instructor deviating from the course outline' and the complaint process in general — always vexing. As well, after the reports, we have a vigorous exchange of views on the nature and value of grading itself, coming coincidentally at term-end when many of us engage in that sometimes agonizing process.

This timely dialogue began as a discussion paper from Jean Ballard to Department Heads, which Paul Burkhardt suggested should be exposed to the wider audience of *W&V*. Don Chapman's original e-mail response to Jean is presented here as well, in a modified form.

At any rate, my instructional soul has sure as heck been harrowed. You see, I have in the past deviated — again and again — transgressed, gone beyond my course outlines, yea verily, introducing and engaging with material that was not starkly highlighted black & white on my handouts to students, weakly and wantonly responding to what I then wrongly perceived as so-called 'individual class needs' and the currents/questions/concerns raised in class-time by my perennial groups of diverse program area and thus differently-skilled students.

To make matters worse, alas and/or alack, I've been far from "unanimous," as Missus Slocum would say, about grading, waffling from term-to-term and year-to-year between wanting to give credit where it is due and bemoaning an evaluative process that at times seems to obscure or obstruct teaching/learning.

The problem was that I had, well, thoughts — in my head, I mean — weird notions and disturbing ideas aroused by my environment, and from reading, researching, talking to colleagues, seeing and being exposed to things. And, seduced by those unrighteous perceptions, I would find myself, you know, mulling things over, questioning myself, fretting over paedagogical choices, changing my mind, re-thinking past assumptions, trying fresh strategies, updating my skills and techniques, altering approaches in response to altered circumstances, reacting to the shifting reality that umbrellas everything, and so on.

But no more, Hallelujah! It's all fading in memory, like a bad dream now, ever since I confessed my sins, repented, and joined the Church of

the Holy Robot. Never again will I deviate. My course outlines are all done and set forever; I've started to think of them as a kind of Holy Writ, dictated to me from on high, up on Sumas Mountain. Maybe I'll have them chiselled into a couple of granite tablets: to be kept in my specially reinforced briefcase, or slung perchance, millstone-style, around my neck at all times...

Now my job, everything really, is so much less stressful — with the thinking part of the equation removed. I feel blessed, and, dear God, even tuneful, a bit like my favourite song about robotism: "part person, part machine, really something in-between," ready, willing, and able to provide seamless customer satisfaction. So read on, and repent ye sinners. It's fun AND easy, once you see the lite!

-the Instructoid
formerly known as Ryszard Dubanski



President's Report

Current Issues

Bargaining continues to be our main focus; however, as is normal, we are engaged in other issues — within our membership, on the provincial front, and, of course, with UCFV Administration. Two really important ones that we are dealing with right now are the alleged January 29th Abbotsford Child Care Centre incident and a grievance involving the academic freedom of a Faculty member. I single these out because they are very serious and could have far-reaching implications for our members.

UCFV and the FSA have been anticipating the completion of the investigation into the Child Care incident. To date, March 16th, we have been waiting six weeks. This has been very hard on everyone involved.

Until the investigation, which is being carried out by an outside agency, is concluded, we can not move forward on this.

The academic freedom case is one on which Bob Smith reported in the last *W&V*, and again in this one. We thought this case settled by grievance last December, but it was re-opened by the UC in February. This situation is exacerbated by many complexities, including issues of harassment, the unfairness to Faculty of the Student Complaint Policy, and by UCFV breaking an agreement, in the form of a grievance resolution, with the FSA.

Student complaints and grade appeals are increasing dramatically throughout post-secondary. At UCFV it is not just the increase in complaints that is alarming, but the ferocity of them and the way in which they are being used. Our Student Complaint Policy is such that students can make false and malicious statements about Faculty with Faculty having little or no recourse. Even if the complaint is completely unfounded — which I believe many are — the record of the complaint is put in the UC files. (It is unclear how long the files are kept and by whom they can be accessed.) UCFV, and other institutions, take all student complaints, no matter how dubious, very seriously for fear of legal action by the student(s). If legal action is actually taken, the institution wants to be able to prove that it did everything possible to address the student(s) concerns.

Unfortunately, this leaves the accused, usually a Faculty member, unsupported and vulnerable. In this particular case, a group of students employed a complaint about an Instructor's style and deviation from the course outline as a form of blackmail. The students filed a joint complaint, making unsubstantiated allegations about the Instructor, then told UCFV they would withdraw the complaint, *if* the UC met their demands — which were numerous and in our opinion unreasonable. UCFV was willing to give in to the students without investigating the allegations or allowing the Instructor

to defend himself. It was at that point we brought in CIEA and filed our second grievance. As of this writing the grievance is yet unresolved.

Of course I am not suggesting that we should not have a student complaint or grade appeal policy. Certainly, students must have the right to complain. On the other hand, our members should have the right not to be found guilty prior to a hearing. Instructors have an obligation to give students the best education they possibly can, and students have the right to expect the best Instructors can give, but some post-secondary institutions are behaving as if students are consumers, with a 'the customer is always right' attitude ruling. Educational facilities are about learning, not customer satisfaction. Individual Instructors' opinions and approaches to curricula may change and vary — that's part of what it means to get a well-rounded education. We are not Wal-Mart, after all: grades should be earned, not bought. Nor should we be open to bribes and bullying.

Bargaining

As we are updating you on the provincial and local bargaining fronts as developments unfold, I will not repeat the information here but ask you to refer to the recent bargaining bulletins.

Table Officers

I am really pleased to report that our weekly Table Officer meetings have been extremely well attended, often getting out as many of the Executive as we used to get at the monthly meetings. The weekly meetings have proved to be a far more efficient way of handling the FSA's day-to-day business. The Executive is better informed and issues are dealt with promptly.

Fenella has done a great job in getting the TO minutes and agenda out every Monday. Fenella is also taking the minutes at the meetings now, but I want to thank Madeleine

Hardin, Tim Cooper, and sometimes Leslie Wood, for taking and producing the minutes for the better part of this academic year.

CUPE Contract

Thanks to Kevin Busswood, and JR, we have a new contract with our CUPE employees — Fenella Sobchuk and Jacqueline Ritter. Due to Kevin's superb negotiating skills, once bargaining began last November the process moved along very quickly. The agreement, which was reached in December, was approved by the FSA Executive at the January meeting. The contract highlights are: a two year agreement; an increase in PD funds from a minimum of \$500/yr to a minimum of \$800/yr, with the ability to roll the PD fund over for two years— much like what we are asking for in our FSA negotiations; a change in annual vacation, making them very similar to what our UCFV Staff have; a 2% wage increase retro to Sept 30/00 plus parity with whatever FSA Staff get in the new contract (in other words if FSA Staff get 5%, our CUPE employees will get an additional 3% on top of the 2%). This is also retro to Sept 30/00. If however, FSA Staff get less than 2%, our CUPE employees will retain their 2%). Good job Kevin!

CIEA Membership

Last Fall's overwhelming vote for local bargaining (248 to 40) caused some members, including some of the Executive, to question our CIEA membership. The FSA Executive debated its concerns, but felt the issue was best left until bargaining was concluded. Of course, bargaining has not concluded, but because this is the last issue of *W&V* for this academic year, I felt I should raise the issue for your comment.

Do we want to hold another CIEA referendum? We have had two in the past, in the early 90's I believe. There are very good reasons for staying with CIEA, and, on the other hand, some compelling arguments for going it alone. The FSA's CIEA dues average \$13,000 per month, which calculates to about 40% of our yearly revenue.

Because of our high expenses and low dues assessment (we and a few other locals are the lowest in the province at 1.5%), we are a bare bones operation with a small contingency fund. We could not afford to fight a costly arbitration, we do not retain legal council, and we do not have a strike fund.

The FSA has only had one arbitration since its inception 25 years ago, but arbitration is always a possibility. If we did have to go to arbitration, CIEA would cover the cost and provide a labour lawyer. We don't retain legal council because we have access to CIEA's Staff representatives who are experts in labour law and negotiations. We also have access to CIEA lawyers through the Staff reps. We do not have our own strike fund because part of our CIEA dues go into a CIEA strike fund which is in excess of \$4 million. The argument has been made, however, that if we hadn't been paying dues to CIEA all these years the FSA would have a large strike fund and large contingency fund by now.

For whatever reasons the FSA is not as involved with CIEA as many of the other locals are. We have a hard time finding people willing to sit on CIEA committees. And, we are often the 'odd-man-out' when it comes to CIEA issues — we march to the beat of a different drum, so to speak. We do not ask them for advice as often as the other locals do and we do not ask them to get involved with our local bargaining. At many locals it is the CIEA Staff reps who do the actual local bargaining. "It's just not the way we do things at UCFV, it's not our culture," is what I hear all the time, and I know its true. Nevertheless, we do ask for CIEA's help from time to time (actually we have quite a bit lately), and I, and present Grievance Chairs, Bob and Heidi, have always found them very accommodating. They have supplied valuable information, and helped us with many difficult issues. Our CIEA Staff Rep Linda Sperling will come to the campus if we ask her, and we can phone her any time night or day.

No doubt opening the CIEA membership issue again could become very contentious, so before we do, I want to make sure there is an appetite for it. If you have comments, questions, or concerns about this please email me at lowenb or call local 4449.

Get Your Nomination in Folks,
the Competition will be Fierce...

It's that time of year again, and we in the FSA office are preparing ourselves. We thought we would handle it a little differently this year by asking for your cooperation in advance. I am referring, of course, to the stampede of members desirous of FSA Executive positions. I tell you it is shocking to what lengths people will go to register their nomination forms. The situation can get quite dangerous at times. To protect ourselves in past years we've had to go as far as putting double locks on the ABBY office door, having our communications (mail, e-mail, and phone calls) screened by CaTs, and having to wear shin pads (as a few members resort to kicking to get our attention). We expect this year's election to be as highly competitive as always, so to cut down on the thousands of requests for information on the various positions, we will get a hard copy of the job descriptions out to you shortly with a nomination form attached.

If you are interested in running for a position, please return the back page nomination form to the ABBY FSA office ... in a civilized manner.

Thank you for your cooperation. See you at the Annual General Meeting, May 2nd, ABBY Theatre 3:00p.m.

-Beverly Lowen



Faculty Grievance Report

In the last *W&V*, I reported a grievance and its resolution. The FSA re-opened the grievance in February. The original grievance arose in November when UCFV responded to student complaints about an Instructor by offering them a re-run of the course involved and then barred the Instructor from teaching it. This action called into question his qualifications and reputation before students and colleagues and was taken outside the appropriate procedure (the Students' Instruction Complaint Policy 310.3) which directs Management to mediate between complainants and respondent. The employer granted two remedies — a cooling-off period prior to the Instructor's next evaluation in view of the fact that his qualifications and reputation may well have been tarnished by the employer's back-door or 'constructive' discipline and a UCFV invitation to the Instructor to join the team of colleagues offering the repeat course.

In January the students requested a tuition waiver for the course and stated that if this was granted they would abandon policy proceedings against the Instructor. The employer did consult with the FSA and the Instructor. The FSA considered the request a form of harassment and the Instructor was willing to face any policy complaint. UCFV refused the request.

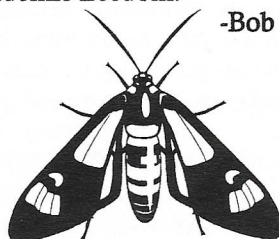
In late January it became clear that the students were displeased by UCFV's refusal, objected to the Instructor's presence in the new course (he was slated to present three lectures in the company of the Instructor of record), and got the idea that the Instructor may have inappropriately used information about them. In early February seven students filed notices of instructional complaint. This would have been OK as students are entitled to bring forth allegations under the policy. However, on the day they filed the notices, a senior manager approached the grievor with a 'request' to withdraw from the course as his continued involvement would

complicate matters, e.g., increasing UCFV's liability. The Instructor complied or cooperated.

The FSA grieved right away. Because UCFV had requested and secured the Instructor's withdrawal from this course in a one-on-one way and failed to approach the FSA, it had set aside one of the remedies the FSA accepted in December to resolve that grievance — the Instructor's involvement in the course. The employer may not make an agreement with the FSA then subvert it by individual bargaining and of course not asking the FSA, a bad labour practice. The FSA is now demanding new remedies, including damages, because UCFV has caused the Instructor a good deal of anguish. Twice the college has intervened, not following its own policy.

The FSA's view in these events is that UCFV failed to adhere to the relevant policy procedures, in which the Instructor also has rights of due process. Further, UCFV did not defend the Instructor's right to academic freedom (Article 12.4 in the Collective Agreement); this is especially ironic, given that the students' complaint, though framed on what they contend are the requirements of the course outline and articulation, has been focused all along on violation of their rights to academic freedom.

-Bob Smith



Staff Grievance Chair Report

Allocation of Hours

A 57% type A Staff member approached me regarding the allocation of additional hours within his department. The Staff member claimed that additional hours were being given to a substitute worker that is employed within his

department before they were being offered to the type A Staff member.

In a situation like this, the hours should have been offered to the part-time A less than 100% so that he would have the chance to top up his contract to 100% if the hours were available. At this point any additional hours can then be offered to the substitute worker. When the employee and I spoke with the employer they were more than happy to offer additional hours to this part-time A Staff employee.

Medical Appointments

I have had many calls from employees recently asking whether or not they are entitled to attend doctor or dentist appointments on work time. Article 26.13 (a) of the Collective Agreement says that UCFV is under no obligation to grant time off with pay to employees for purposes of medical and dental appointments. At the discretion of the employer, time off with pay may be granted where the employee can demonstrate unusual circumstances. If an employee needs to attend a non-routine medical or dental appointment, that would be covered under article 25.7 (Special Leave).

As well, an employee may be granted permission by her or his administrator to attend medical and dental appointments provided that acceptable arrangements have been made. This may include making up the time or having an adjustment in pay to reflect the missed time.

Shop Stewards

I want to take a moment to recognize the shop stewards for all their hard work this past year. Many of them volunteer their time to help out their fellow FSA members. The FSA appreciates your commitment as do the many members who have benefitted from your services. Thanks, and keep up the good work.

-Heidi Tvete

The Future of Our Work

February 10, Ellen and I attended a CEIA-sponsored conference on "The Future of Our Work."

The conference opened with Jim Turk, director of the Canadian Association of Teachers. Following are some of his thought-provoking observations which affirmed some of our own concerns about what is happening in education.

Jim spoke to the challenges that face post-secondary education both from within and without: the commercialization of education and the impact of technology on the current quality of education. Commercialization is evident in the growth of private institutions and the adoption of corporate style management-hierarchical structures replacing collegial governance. We have been encouraged to think and talk about education as a business with customers/clients or products replacing students and learning outcomes, wherein Instructors can be considered product deliverers. We have a retailer/ customer relationship which emphasizes pleasing the customer rather than one in which Instructors challenge and encourage students to look beyond their preconceived expectations.

The growth of on-line courses poses a significant threat to quality education as well as to the security of Instructors' creative endeavors. The potential for 'unbundling' a course so that various aspects can be dealt with by different people is tempting to administrations. Creation of curriculum, delivery of the course, handling of student of assignments, and tutoring support can be farmed out to less expensive employees. At the present time in BC, 35 to 40% of Faculty are non-regulators who often don't have office space or paid prep time. If we exploit cheap labour to teach we are contradicting ourselves by suggesting that teaching is not valuable.

The teacher-to-teacher relationship is being changed by the funding framework. Research, which is being emphasized, is now supported 60% by industry and business.

Individuals within departments see themselves in competition, so cooperative, collegial scholarship is undermined. This also has a potential for limiting diversity in research when only 40% is funded publically.

What should we be working toward?

- Insist on Federal funding for core operations and research
- Protect and enhance "hand crafted" education
- Resist the commercialization of education with its emphasis on productivity
- Look carefully at the allocation of funding within institutions. First consider the implications on both teaching and learning (students and Instructors).
- Seek clarity about what is behind the prevalent drive for the internationalization of education.
- Develop policies on intellectual property — in an on-line teaching environment, who owns and delivers a course?
- There are many aspects of on-line education that need more attention. Consider the workload it entails. Instructors should have mandatory training to develop on-line courses and have limits to enrolment.

If we don't pay attention to these matters, our future could be shaped for us, and we and the students will lose. Education could become an employer-controlled commodity.

Education is a process, but it is being re-tooled by commercialization and re-conceived as a product electronically mediated. Education could be diminished, and we could be undermining the quality of education and compromising our vital role in a democratic society.

-Catherine McDonald
& Ellen Dixon

The Meaning Behind the Grade — or, Pandora's Box

The purpose of this paper is to generate discussion and reflection about the meaning of letter grades, in response to questions which seem to pop up among students and Faculty every time grades are posted on the boards near Faculty Reception. While this topic has certainly been raised in the past, I believe it merits revisiting, in view of changes which have occurred (in our mandate, student population, Faculty, and programming) over the past decade.

Every semester, I hear students and/or Faculty commenting on the grade distribution in one or more courses where virtually all the students are, according to the UCFV Calendar interpretation of letter grades (p.21), apparently "Excellent." How can that be, ponders the student/Faculty member? Is the Instructor a gifted teacher? Or an easy marker? Are the definitions of the letter grades different from that used in other classes? Are the standards drastically different? Did fate just throw together a whole group of 'gifted' students? Is there some other explanation?

Like most, if not all, Faculty at UCFV, I fret over my final grades — hoping that the promising, conscientious student who showed incredible insight and ability ends up with a percentage total which merits him/her an A+ grade, and knowing that there will be a few students for whom no amount of effort on my part or theirs seems to enable them to achieve higher than a P. Like most Faculty, I also feel distress at the fact that, in most of my classes, there will be one or two students at least (more in first year) who simply don't make the grade. It puzzles me, therefore, when I see grade sheets with all A's (and by that, I include A+ and A-). I have a tendency to assume (and I acknowledge my assumption may

well be invalid!) that at least some students in this class are receiving A grades for average work.

My colleagues have suggested alternate explanations. A program with a high GPA entrance requirement, or a program which tends to attract people who already hold degrees, or a program geared to upgrade professionals already working in the field, might well expect to see its students achieve higher grades than other students. (But surely, there would still be a considerable number of above average or B students in the group?). A program that teaches mastery of hands-on skills, where the students have either learned the technique or failed to learn it, may have little basis on which to differentiate successful students. (But perhaps these courses should be graded as CR/NC?). A program in which graduates must have a certain GPA in order to become accredited in their professional association may feel obligated to mark generously. (But at what cost to academic integrity?).

A few years back, we introduced the grade 'A+' which enabled students to achieve a numerical equivalent of 4.33. And a significant number of students have been obtaining A+ grades. I have no argument with that; excellence deserves to be recognized: as long as we haven't simply moved everything up a notch, so that the quality of work which led to an A in the past now leads to an A+, and the quality of work which led to an A- in the past now leads to an A, and so on. However, there is an increasing proportion of students eligible for priority registration, based on their 'exceptional' GPA. In fact, I was recently told (though I have not verified this) that nearly one third of our students now receive priority registration based on having a GPA of 3.5 or over. This seems quite remarkable. Similarly, it is my impression (again, not verified) that an increasing number of students graduate with the recognition of being 'on the Dean's List', an honour designating exceptional academic performance. By identifying so many as exceptional (whether for priority registration or for the Dean's List), are we devaluing the work of the truly head-and-shoulders-above-the-others student?

These concerns lead me to pose the following questions:

1. Why do some classes end up with nearly all A grades; and why is this outcome more prevalent in some programs than in others?
2. Are the programs with higher percentages of students on the Dean's List also those with higher entrance requirements?
3. What do the letter grades mean? Are the interpretations in the Calendar used consistently across disciplines?
4. What process, if any, should be used to account for grading anomalies, such as courses where nearly all students receive an A, or where nearly all students fail?
5. Do departments and/or curriculum committees routinely discuss these issues?
6. Are new Faculty members given any guidelines to assist them in determining appropriate letter grades for their students' work?

Whether high grades within a program are due to structural anomalies (such as the percent of students with prior degrees) or due to a different perception of what constitutes excellence, there are consequences for inconsistencies across programs. For example, priority registration becomes problematic when students in a program with an abnormal number of excellent scholars can choose as electives courses which 'average' students in another program may require. (This is particularly alarming in view of the recent suggestion that reserve seating be eliminated).

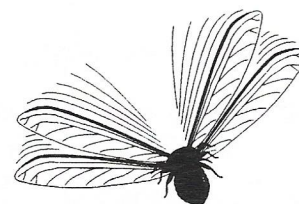
If high grades are the result of grade inflation (and I have no evidence of this), then the situation is even more problematic. After all, scholarships and awards are often based on academic achievement. If some students are getting high grades

for average work, they have an unfair advantage when competing for these awards. In addition, grade inflation within a program or course may also lead to greater student/Instructor conflict and more appeals, as students come to expect high grades for average work.

Generous grading, for whatever reason, devalues the work of the truly outstanding students within the same course. Last spring, a friend of mine (who was a student in a class where the lowest mark was an A-) told me that students who had put in an incredible amount of time and energy to do an outstanding presentation felt really depressed when other students who presented a short paper with little research (and mostly read verbatim to the class, using no visual aids), received the same letter grades as the clearly more professional presentations.

This discussion starter is not intended to be a comprehensive discussion of the implications of grading. The Program Advisory committee has raised related questions regarding minimum entrance, continuance and exit GPAs and other issues, and Academic Standard committee has been examining related issues concerning the order of registration. Nor is this paper intended to imply that UCFV needs some across-the-board approach regarding grade distribution. But I do think we, as educators, need to periodically ask ourselves the question "What do the letter grades mean?" And I eagerly await your responses. No stones or rotten tomatoes, please. A simple NC on the bottom of the page will do... or maybe an A?

-Jean Ballard



Grading: The Emperor Has No Clothes

Note: An earlier version of the text below was sent to Jean Ballard as a private e-mail. On the basis of the earlier document, Jean encouraged a more public offering. The original has been revised/expanded for that purpose.

Jean, since reading your thought piece on the problems you see with student grading at UCFV, there has been a bit of me that has actually wanted to sit down and systematically pull together some work on evaluation and grading, and to synthesize that into a full response. In relation to the other tasks I have, however, the bit of me that has wanted to fully engage in such a task has remained relatively small. Please accept this offering as a small effort on my behalf, to enter the conversation about grading. I write this, in part, because I do not want your thought piece to end in silence from your colleagues. It takes a good deal of courage to offer up to our community a piece such as ours; and, my own feeling is that you should at least have a sense that your offering caused a pause, for some of us, in our individual mad-long rush to do our daily tasks.

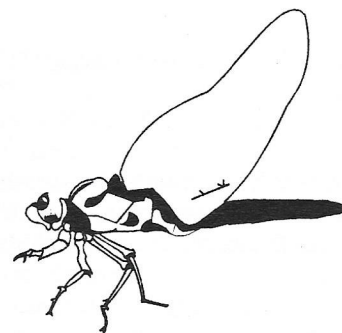
I must say to you, however, that I do not share what I understand to be your view of a preferred option for addressing "the grading problem." It strikes me, that in raising the topic of grades at UCFV as a problem, one necessarily must come from a point of view, either explicit or implicit, based on the assumptions one has about the purpose(s) grades serve and what the assigned grades in any term, in any course, ought to look like. My sense is that you are troubled on at least three counts:

1. apparent grade inflation,
2. apparent lack of adherence to 'official' standard criteria, and
3. evidence of a lack of 'appropriate' ranking.

I think that my alternative perspective likely starts with some differences with regard to pretty basic assumptions about the nature of evaluation of learning, and to the questionable (but very conventional) assumption that we can effectively represent the complexity of learning in the form of single-point letter or number references. At the very least, the notion of evaluation of learning and grading seems to me to be a more complex enterprise than for which we may give it credit (so to speak). Indeed, it may not be the process of assigning grades which is broken and in need of fixing, but the very notion that one can grade at all, and that such grades can then represent some universally-meaningful currency, divorced of context, divorced of reference to process, divorced of some understanding of the actors, etc.

To me, the conventional concerns about grading seem to arise out of what I judge to be a fairly narrow (albeit conventional) conceptualization of the process of evaluation of learning and of the process of applying single-point grade assignments as an apparent representation of the learning. For what it is worth, I do agree that grading is problematic, not just at UCFV, but perhaps even in the fundamentals of the conventional conception. You may be aware that much before today, others (Taylor, 1977, Taylor, 1986) have recognized the problematic nature of grades in Canadian higher education. In his most recent article, Taylor (1986) refers to Canadian university grading as a "tower of babble." In fairness, my reading is that many of Taylor's concerns arise from a set of assumptions which I am judging may underpin your own reflections on "the grading problem." I mention Taylor mostly to draw attention to the matter that the fact that the lack of clothing on the grading emperor is not a problem which is unique to UCFV, nor is it unique to this particular time or even to the past decade.

As such, I think it is increasingly evident — across the educational enterprise, not just at UCFV — that



the grading emperor really does not have any clothing. At the very least, your paper draws attention to this fact. I do not think, however, that the 'solution' (for lack of a better word) rests in a 'return to the basics'. I am rather loosely applying this notion of back-to-the-basics to the idea that grades within a particular class generally ought to be 'normally' distributed (statistically speaking), and that perhaps we, at UCFV, need to consider a return (assuming we were ever there in the first place) to some sort of agreement on a standardized approach to assessment and grading, which would be reflective of an agreed-upon distribution and universally-shared structure of meaning. I think that such a return to the basics may represent an artificial, symptomatic treatment, which likely avoids the real discussion of learning evaluation which I suspect would be useful to undertake.

As I said earlier, I do not feel in a position at this time to try to begin to marshal a comprehensive examination of evaluation and grading, even if one assumed that I had the capacity to do so. What I would like to do, however, is to draw attention to some of the aspects of the complexity to which I refer. My hope is that these following references, which have simply come easily to hand, may serve to prevent us from too quickly deciding that the grading emperor really is fully clothed and that our critical eyes have only been playing temporary tricks on us. And most of all, I hope to prevent us from feeling immediately safe about

possibly instituting rules which might ensure a homogenized, fully-clothed look to grading assignments at UCFV.

Let me open the matter of complexity by an effort to call attention to what I might label the differentiated nature of the learners. It is no secret that my chosen field of study is adult education, and I currently practice my vocation in this potentially-novel higher education setting. In relation to this, I recently was reading an article, A Model of College Outcomes for Adults by Donaldson & Graham (1999). Speaking about the USA. context, the authors begin by stating:

Adults are now a powerful segment of the undergraduate population and are dramatically changing the nature of higher education today. They make up about 40% to 45% of the students enrolled in higher education.... They are enrolling part-time, taking courses through the Internet and other distance technologies and demanding creative ways to complete their education where they spend little or no time on campus.

The authors then go on to make an interesting and sometimes compelling case for the notion that learning and learning outcomes for such students — who are, what I would call, an absent presence on campus — may be much different (not better or worse) than is the case for what the authors term “traditional-age” students.

I did some checking on 1997 UCFV ‘Halloween Report’ statistics as published on our website (<http://www.ucfv.bc.ca/oars/studir.htm>). By my quick calculations, based on these data, 40% of the UCFV student population is age 25 or above, and almost 2/3 of the UCFV students are taking three courses or less! So, the UCFV student population, by conventional measures, is mostly part time, and significantly NOT of “traditional age” — a profile very much similar to that outlined in the above article.

While this article does not directly address the grading matter, it does

seem to me to draw our attention to some of the aspects of the institutional teaching-learning setting which militate against a one-size-fits-all notion of how learning ought to be assessed and how grades might be assigned in relation to learner and learning variation. I make this assertion based on the notion that this article seems to make problematic any singular notion of the nature of learners, of learning itself, and of learning circumstances. Indeed, the article seems to suggest that there are different ways of coming to know.

This matter of learner complexity caused me to think also about a work on grading produced by two University of Alberta scholars (Fenwick & Parsons, 1999). Chapter 14 of their book is entitled, Evaluating for Grades: What's in a Number? They begin a subsection, called “The Meaning of A Grade” with the following statement about the fluid nature of grades:

A number (and one assumes, a letter, as well) grade is an arbitrary symbol. Although it seems concrete, a grade is imbued with many taken-for-granted cultural meanings (p.123).

The authors then draw attention to grading complexity and symbolic meaning by asking several questions similar to the following:

- Does the grade represent the quality of products prepared and submitted by the learner over a period of time?
- Does the grade represent only the quality the learner is finally able to produce by the end of the course?
- Does the grade represent the amount of knowledge the learner is able to remember and reproduce?
- Does the grade represent the progress made by a particular learner since beginning the course, rather than arrival at some pre-determined point?

- Is the grade intended to be a normative comparison among the learners who happen to be involved in the course experience at that particular time?

Questions such as these draw our attention to the complex meaning which may be embedded in any set of symbolic grade assignments. There are diverse meaning outcomes of the evaluative process, added to the notion of learners as differentiated and differentially situated. At the very least, such conditions cause me to think that, were I to look at grades across the range of courses at UCFV, I would expect to find almost no consistency — except, perhaps, a vague tendency driven by some conventional wisdom about standardization, such as the UCFV Calendar statement about grade distributions and meanings. My assumptions lead me to expect a lack of adherence to standards external to the particular teaching/learning setting!

Finally, I make reference to an article which is more esoteric, perhaps, in terms of the direct application of the ideas to grading. To me, this article is quite the most exciting in terms of my own thinking about learning and how learning might be assessed. In addressing adult development, which may by a synonym for learning — even for academic learning — Marsha Rossiter (1999) seems to call into question (in a reflective practice kind of way) the very notions of who it ought to be that decides what might be “useful” or “appropriate” learning.

Often, as educators, our conventional wisdom is that WE likely know best how one most effectively becomes (as opposed to ‘gets’) a Bachelor of Arts, a scientist, a speaker of English as a second language, a social worker, a law enforcement officer, useful citizen, etc. In educational terms, we may think of this becoming (usually phrased as “getting” an education) process, or developing process, as like assembly-line rust-

proofing in a car manufacturing facility. We 'dip' the learner in a prescribed set of several rust-proofing baths, called courses, and at the end of the process, s/he is appropriately rust-proofed and ready for the final colour coating. This process makes me immediately think of the various coloured hoods we use in the graduation ceremony, but I digress.

Rossiter makes this educating/becoming process more complex for us, certainly in terms of evaluating and grading. Rossiter states:

Central to the narrative perspective is the idea that the self is not a fixed entity, an autonomous agent, moving through a developmental sequence, but rather, the self is an unfolding story (p.62).

If we think of "educational becoming" as much or more than knowledge acquisition, what would the meaning of grades be from such a perspective? Who would assign the grades? What expectations would we have about how such grades would be arrayed? And so on....

Rossiter asks her own questions (p.67) in relation to the role of the educator as evaluator — as one thinks about learning from the perspective of narrative:

- What is the developmental narrative this learner is living?
- What is the plot of her or his story?
- What is the meaning of this learning experience in this learner's story?
- Is it an adventure? A punishment? A gift? A redemption?

So, taking all three references above, my point is really about complexity. Educational viewpoints such as the above cause me to think that the meaning of, for example, B+ likely will be absolutely conditional and situational. If one accepts my assertion in this regard, Jean, then you and I might well be on the way to agreeing that B+ or A or C become

relatively meaningless as universal constructs. Grade assignments such as these are exposed, then, to be naked, in terms of standardized expectations. You and I might then agree that such grading likely represents a false currency in terms of documenting learning in any universal sense. The short-hand no longer works to convey universal meaning. But perhaps it no longer works for good reason.

In concluding, I want to acknowledge that my comments above do not readily point to a 'fix'. If anything, I hope that my reflections simply help us to be effective at sorting out the nature of the problem. The grading emperor is unlikely to be subject to an immediate coup, even if we all were to quickly agree about the lack of clothing. I would like to end, however, with one solution-like suggestion regarding the apparent concern about grade inflation. I do believe that there is a singular administrative act which we have the capacity to take at UCFV which is likely to immediately ameliorate (although not eliminate) the upward pressure on grades.

In my view, grade point average should be de-linked forthwith from decisions about the sequence of registration. This use of the grade assignments not only is questionable because of the meaning problems mentioned above, but linking grade attainment to registration sequence, in a situation of scarce seat availability (if I have my economic theory correct), serves primarily to increase inflationary pressure. Such pressure may be in the form of increased propensity to cheat (in all its forms), in questionable student appeals (informal or formal), in reduced cooperation among learners in the teaching/learning setting, or even in the inclination for educators to assign grades in such a way as to offset the prospect of student complaints about low course averages. I am sure that the pressure is felt in other ways as well.

The convention of linking grades to registration sequence in BC post-secondary institutions may be quite

common, but I have yet to hear a convincing educational argument for doing so. And assuming there are any positive consequences of such a policy, I am convinced absolutely, that any such useful effects are far outweighed by negative effects of the distorting influence this policy has on the already-troubled practice of assigning grades

-Regards, Don

(Ed. In addition to a stimulating article, Don Chapman kindly provides the following list for further reading on the thorny topic of grading and evaluation.)

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Taylor, H. (1977). Differences in grading systems among Canadian universities. Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 7 (1), 47-54.

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On Whatever

These *pensées* came to us from Dan Heller's web page – Ed.)

On Metaphysics

Déjà Fu: the feeling that somehow, somewhere, you've been kicked in the head like this before.

On Problem Solving

When the only tool you own is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. (Abraham Maslow)

On Poetic Love

When you're swimmin' in a creek
An eel bites you on the cheek
That's a moray
(Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers)

On Modernism

Q: How many surrealists does it take to screw in a lightbulb?

A: Two; one to hold the giraffe, and the other to fill the bathtub with brightly coloured machine tools.

On World Politics

Diplomacy is the art of saying "nice doggy" until you can find a rock.

To Bard, or Not to Bard

British schools told they no longer have to teach plays by Shakespeare

British secondary school pupils will no longer have to study Shakespeare or any other great work of English literature for exams under proposals being considered by the government.

The plan, which will outrage traditionalists, has been sent to education secretary David Blunkett by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the government's adviser.

It recommends that Shakespeare and the entire English literary canon be abandoned in favour of media studies, the "moving image" and "information reading" which includes the study of Web pages and e-mail.

The proposals are the QCA's new "specifications" for English, which

will come into force next year. They say the present requirement that all secondary school pupils must study two plays by Shakespeare, when they are 14, should be dropped. Also out are the two lists of major writers of fiction and poetry published before 1914, included as "examples of the English literary heritage."

At present, secondary school pupils must study two works from a list of 19 novelists, including Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Joseph Conrad, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Anthony Trollope and H.G. Wells.

They also have to study poetry by four poets from a list of 28, including Blake, Byron, Chaucer, Donne, Dryden, Keats, Milton, Pope, Shelley, Tennyson and Wordsworth.

Two other lists — of major novelists and poets published after 1914, which were meant to establish a literary benchmark for English teachers — are also gone. The only requirement left in the new specifications is the study of a single novel.

There is also a new emphasis on "drama," which English teachers take to mean contemporary films and videos, and no mention of poetry. The QCA, which describes its "mission" as "promoting quality and coherence in education and training, in the interests of individuals, the economy and society," refused to discuss the proposals.

A spokesman for Blunkett insisted that Shakespeare would continue to be studied. "There is no question of ministers accepting any diminution," he said.

—John Glare
The Daily Telegraph

Acronym Quiz

During the course of my UCFV employment, and especially the years I have worked for the FSA, I have attended countless meetings, both

locally and provincially, and read what seems like thousands of briefs, bulletins, reports, and documents. Although the University College of the Fraser Valley, the Faculty Staff Association, and provincial issues change over time, all the meetings and written materials have had one commonality — acronyms.

My God, post-secondary throws acronyms around like rice at a wedding — we use so many it's like our own language. When someone is new to a post-secondary organization or committee and does not speak that group's particular argot, it can be extremely frustrating and at times embarrassing. I have found that very few committee chairs explain the acronyms they use to new people, nor do authors of reports. Often I've sat in a meeting not understanding what is going on because every third word is some gibberish that stands for something else. And I didn't ask for an explanation, for fear of looking stupid. When I am in a situation like this I feel I am the only person in the room 'out of the loop', only to find out later that others didn't have a clue either.

Soooo, as a service to our members — in the interest of having a little fun, as well as keeping you informed and up to date, we — JR, Fenella, and I — have developed the following quiz (with clues) to test your memory and 'acronym deciphering' skills. Your 'prize' is a nice short-hand list on the final page below to tear off and paste for reference on the inside of your briefcase...or wherever suggests itself. Soon you'll be delighting friends and amazing associates with your fluent Acroneze!

Some are really easy, some tricky, and some are terms you use all the time but will be unable to remember what they stand for. I kept the list to about fifty, but we came up with at least fifty others we could have used. Good luck!



—Bev Lowen

Acronym	Clue	Your Answer Here
UCC	local	
LAMM	cutesy local term	
PAC	local	
RITTL	local - even the committee members have a hard time with this one	
ITS	local - if you know this you are really on top of things	
SCMS	another cutesy local term - pronounced 'scams'	
AECBC	provincial	
PSEA	provincial	
CUPE	no clue needed here	
BCGEU	again no clue	
OH&S	local and provincial	
SWC	local and provincial - pronounced 'swick'	
ITAC	provincial	
UCC	post secondary institution	
PSEC	provincial - pronounced 'peesack'	
JPDC	local	
JCAC	local - although we use this all the time, I bet not many get it right	
SAG	local - pronounced 'sag'	
C2T2	provincial - this is a toughy	
CTM	provincial	
CAUT	federal term - pronounced 'kout'	
CTC	provincial	
BCRC	CIEA term	
CARC	CIEA term - pronounced 'kark'	
EGM	local	
PC	universal term	
CIEA	no clue here	
PC	CIEA term	
JADRC	provincial - pronounced 'jadrack'	
JI	provincial educational facility	

LRB	provincial	
OLA	post secondary institution - pronounced 'ohlaa'	
CNC	post secondary institution	
ER	local	
RPT	local and provincial	
DRC	local	
YMCA	not as easy as it looks	
ARC	local - again, if you know this one you are seriously up to date	
CCP	local	
IMS	local	
ABT	local	
FSA	I sure hope you know this one	
KPE	local and provincial	
LAS	local	
LIBIT	local - pronounced 'libbit'	
Ph.D	Not everyone will get this one	
PY	new one for us, but it's one of Ian McAskill's favorites	
W&V	local	
TGIF	We can all relate to this!	
TTFN	See ya!	

Getting a Post-Secondary Education and Paying For It

Canadians lead the OECD nations in educational attainment. By 1995, 65% of high school graduates were pursuing post-secondary education. Since the mid-1970s, the number of Canadians with post-secondary degrees has grown by an annual average of 5.4%. The share of the labour force with a university education rose from 10% in 1976 to 18% in 1998.

One reason for the change is the very different job prospects for university graduates compared to those with only a high school diploma. The proportion of young people who found full-time work within a year of graduation from high school in 1996 was 66%, but 86% for those with a university degree.

University participation rates and enrolment numbers levelled off in the 1990s. Part of the reason is demographic, reflecting a decline in the relative and absolute size of the youth cohort of the population. Others argue convincingly that declining public funding for post-secondary institutions is also to blame. Most jurisdictions have seen large tuition increases. For example, tuition in undergraduate Arts programs have increased by 126% since 1990.

Rising tuition has been accompanied by greater reliance on student loans and consequent higher indebtedness. The average graduate with a Bachelor's degree in 1982 had debts of \$4,000 (in 1995\$), by 1995 the average debt had more than tripled to \$13,300.

And, of course, tuition increases like those above have made a post-secondary education that much less affordable. Public financial assistance programs notwithstanding, lower income individuals face what must seem to many an impossible barrier to higher education.

The aggregate figures tend to hide variations in access and achievement between groups on the basis of gender, mother tongue, and socio-economic status among other factors. Significant variations exist, but explanations for such variations fall short of the certainty required for sound policies designed to improve access to and affordability of post-secondary education.

The Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation asked CPRN to help it identify knowledge gaps that must be addressed in future policy research on post-secondary access and student financial aid. To that end, Dianne Looker of Acadia University and Graham Lowe, Director of CPRN's Work Network recently prepared a background paper, "Post-Secondary Access and Student Financial Aid in Canada: Current Knowledge and Research Gaps."

That paper provided a basis for discussion at a Research Workshop held in Ottawa in early February. Thirty-five participants, representing a wide range of stakeholder groups, debated the issues raised in the background paper and helped identify themes for a research program on post-secondary access and student financial aid to be undertaken by the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF).

Looker and Lowe have also written a summary of the workshop discussion and recommendations.

You can download a copy of both the Background paper and the Workshop Summary at:

<http://lists.magma.ca:8080/T/A17.44.146.1.476>

BARGAINING BULLETIN — March 23, 2001

Common table bargaining reaches critical point

Our unions continued to bargain salary and benefits at the common table throughout the week, working extended hours and seeking solutions to issues on the table. As bargaining concluded for this week, your joint BCGEU/CIEA negotiating team told employers that we must have a much improved monetary proposal from them the beginning of next week.

Employers are meeting on Friday, March 23. We have encouraged the local union representatives to send a message to their local administration that the current offer is inadequate. Union negotiators will stress to their local administrators that the next set of proposals must be much improved. The next common table bargaining session between unions and employers is scheduled for Monday, March 26.

Bargaining on local issues is now underway at most institutions. The parties received confirmation this week that there is some flexibility on compensation/non-compensation issues at the local tables. Nonetheless, many locals are still experiencing difficulties in getting local agreement and are reporting that money to support the local bargaining is still necessary.

A package of bargaining background materials relating to common and local table issues is now available to members through the BCGEU and CIEA websites. See these at: www.bcgeu.bc.ca or www.ciea.bc.ca. The "Educators Bargaining 2001-Background Package" contains info on: Wages and Benefits; Workload; Professional Development; Maternity and Parental Leave Top-Up; and Education Technology.

For more information, please contact your negotiating committee representative or Roseanne Moran, Communications Representative, CIEA 604.873.8988 ext. 315.

Here They Are!



Answers to the AcroQuiz — clip and save, if you so desire.

ABT	Adult Basic Education
AECBC	Advanced Education Council of British Columbia
ARC	Aboriginal Resource Centre
BCGEU	British Columbia Government Employees' Union
BCRC	Bargaining Coordination and Review Committee
C2T2	Centre for Curriculum, Transfer, and Technology
CARC	Contract Administration and Review Committee
CAUT	Canadian Association of University Teachers
CCP	College and Career Prep.
CIEA	College Institute Educators' Association
CNC	College of New Caledonia
CTC	Career Technical Centre
CTM	Contract Training and Marketing
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
DRC	Disability Resource Centre
EGM	Extraordinary General Meeting
ER	Employee Relations
FSA	Faculty and Staff Association (or as Fenella likes to call it "Fine Sense of Adventure")
IMS	Instructional Media Services
ITAC	Industrial Trades Advisory Commission
ITS	Information Technical Services
JADRC	Joint Administration and Dispute Resolution Committee
JCAC	Job Classification and Audit Committee
JDC	Justice Institute
JDC	Joint Professional Development Committee
KPE	Kinesiology and Physical Education
LAMM	Labor and Management Meeting
LAS	Latin American Studies
LIBIT	Library and Information Technology
LRB	Labor Relations Board
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
OLA	Open Learning Agency
PAC	Program Advisory Committee
PC	Presidents' Council
PC	Personal Computer
PSEA	Public Sector Employers' Association
PSEC	Post Secondary Employers' Council
PY	Person Years
RITTL	Research, Innovation, Technology, Teaching, and Learning
RPT	Regular Part-Time
SAG	Senior Administration Group
SCMS	Social, Cultural, and Media Studies
SWC	Status of Women Committee
TGIF	Thank God it's Friday
TTFN	Ta-Ta for Now
UCC	University-College of the Cariboo
UCC	University-College Council
W&V	<i>Words & Vision</i>
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association





FSA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

WEDNESDAY, MAY 2nd, 2001

THEATRE, ABBOTSFORD,

3.00 - 5.00 PM

Pizza and Refreshments
afterwards in the cafeteria

